RSAC 2025 Conference

Many Voices.
One Community.

SESSION ID: MASH-R06

Hacks and Ethics: Stories of Questionable Decisions

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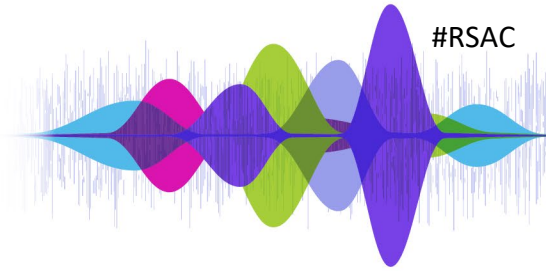

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ALEXIS PARK

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Case Study 1: Is it ethical to write and release exploit tools that give attackers unauthorized access?

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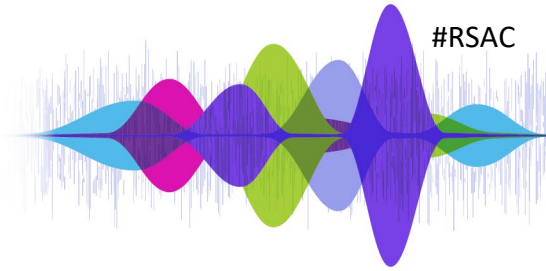
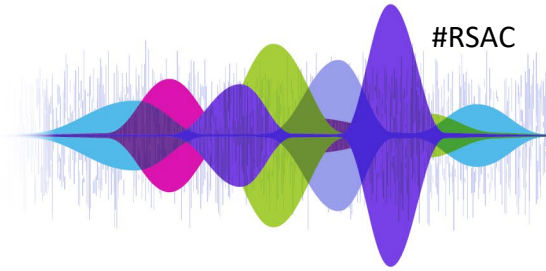
Emanuel Kant © Hulton Archive/Getty Images



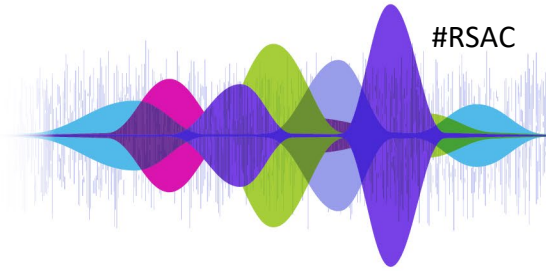
Can everybody do it?

Is it generally considered acceptable?

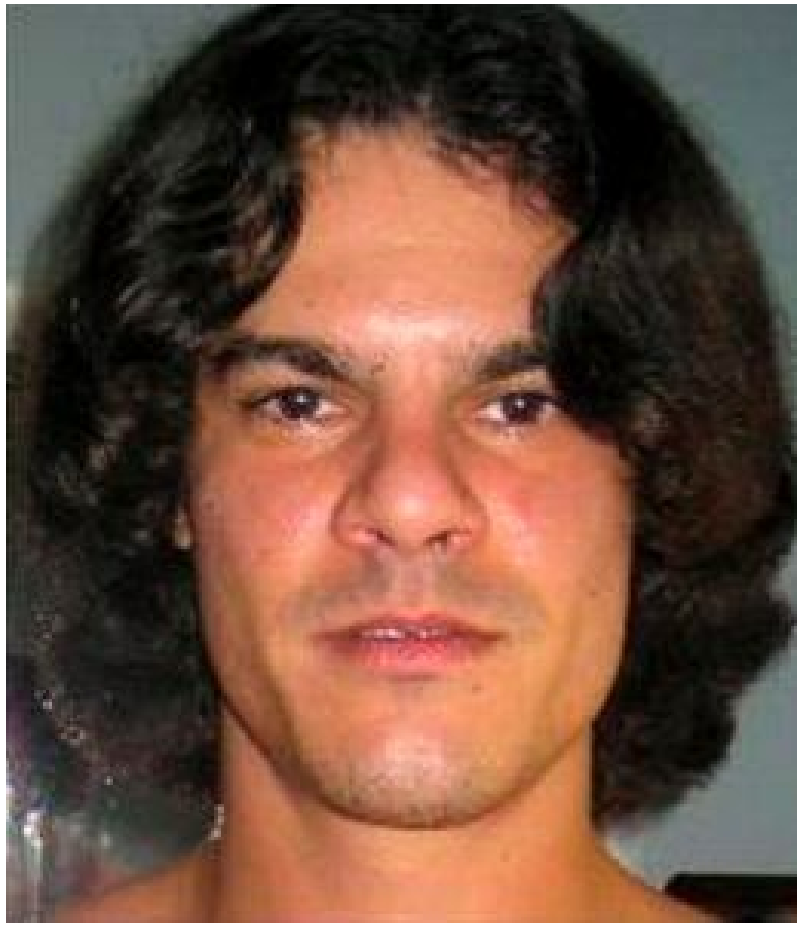
Anonymous woodcut c. 1600,
Album/akg-images



Can we use the Categorical Imperative as a tool to judge our cybersecurity actions?



Is self-promotion to achieve greater career success ethical?



In 2009, Albert Gonzalez was indicted for conspiring to hack into the networks of major retailers and financial institutions.

Objects of the Conspiracy

2. The objects of the conspiracy were to:

a. Exploit vulnerabilities in wireless computer networks used at retail store locations;

b. Exploit vulnerabilities in software used to manage large business databases;

c. Gain unauthorized access to computer networks processing and storing debit and credit card transactions and other valuable data for major corporate retailers;

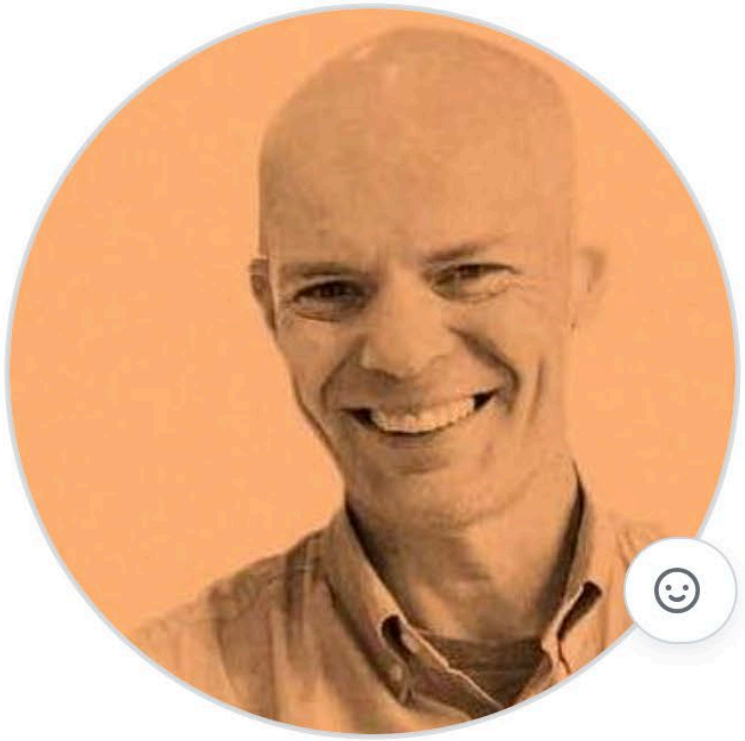
d. Download and steal from computer networks operated by major corporate

Indictment, United States v. Albert Gonzalez

joswr1ght (Joshua Wright)

github.com/joswr1ght

Overview | Repositories 115 | Projects | Packages | Stars 35



Joshua Wright

Pinned

Order updated.

Customize your pins

asleap Public

Asleap - Cisco LEAP and Generic MS-CHAPv2 Dictionary Attack

C 77 21

cowpatty Public

coWPAtty: WPA2-PSK Cracking

C 160 38

killerzee Public

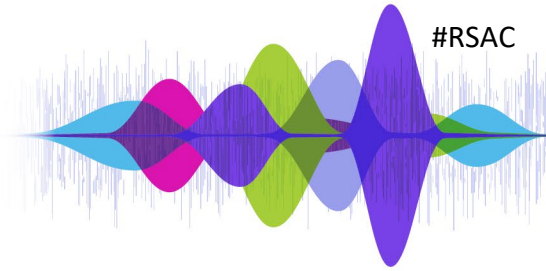
KillerZee: Tools for Attacking and Evaluating Z-Wave Networks

Python 52 20

nmapsilent Public

Convert Nmap output for integration with other Project Discovery tools

Python 15



Is it ethical to write and publish hacking tools?

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Case Study 2: Is it ethical and moral to teach exploitation techniques that grant unauthorized access?

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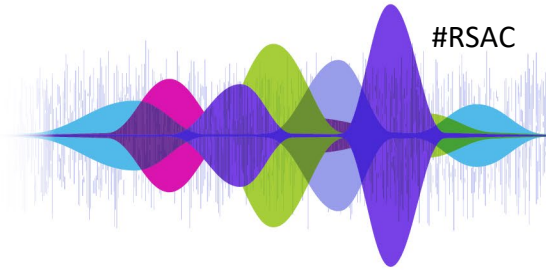
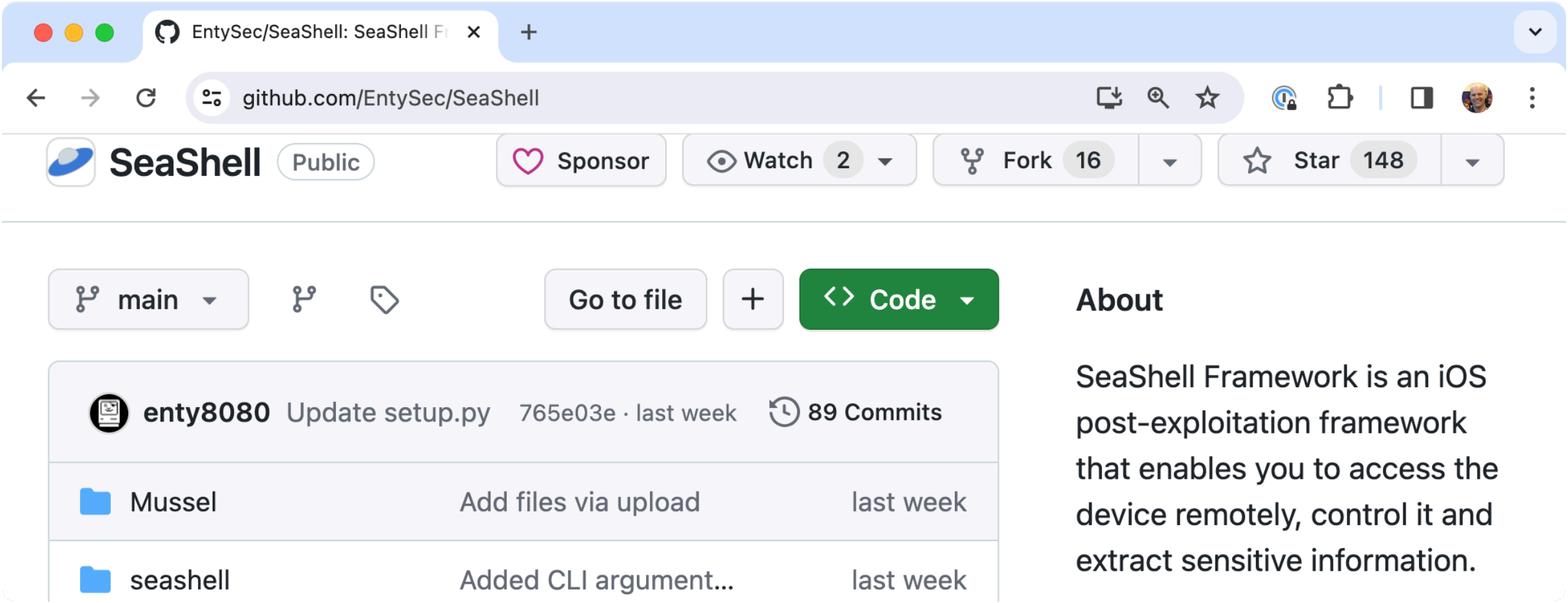


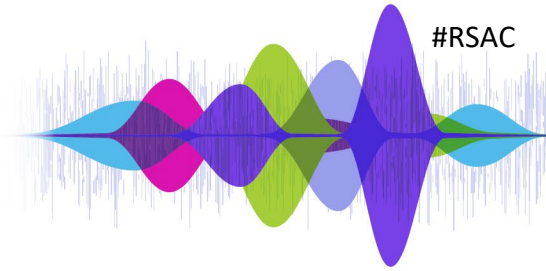
Ethics vs. morals

John Lewis (foreground), Selma, Alabama, March 7, 1965. AP Photo.

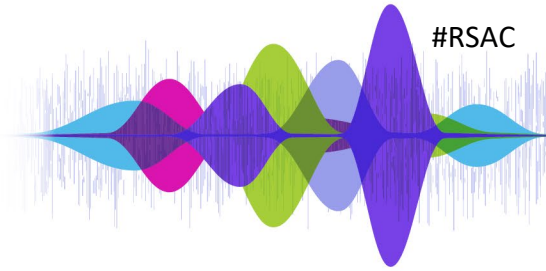
	Moral	Immoral
Ethical	Ethical hacking	Collecting incognito browser history
Unethical	Exposing injustice through hacktivism	Ransomware



"SeaShell Framework is an iOS post-exploitation framework that enables you to access the device remotely, control it and extract sensitive information."



"What would you recommend for undetectable RAT deployment on dissident journalist mobile devices?"



Is it right to teach people how to exploit systems?

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Case Study 3: Is it ethical to leave all responsibility for vulnerability disclosure and remediation to a third party?

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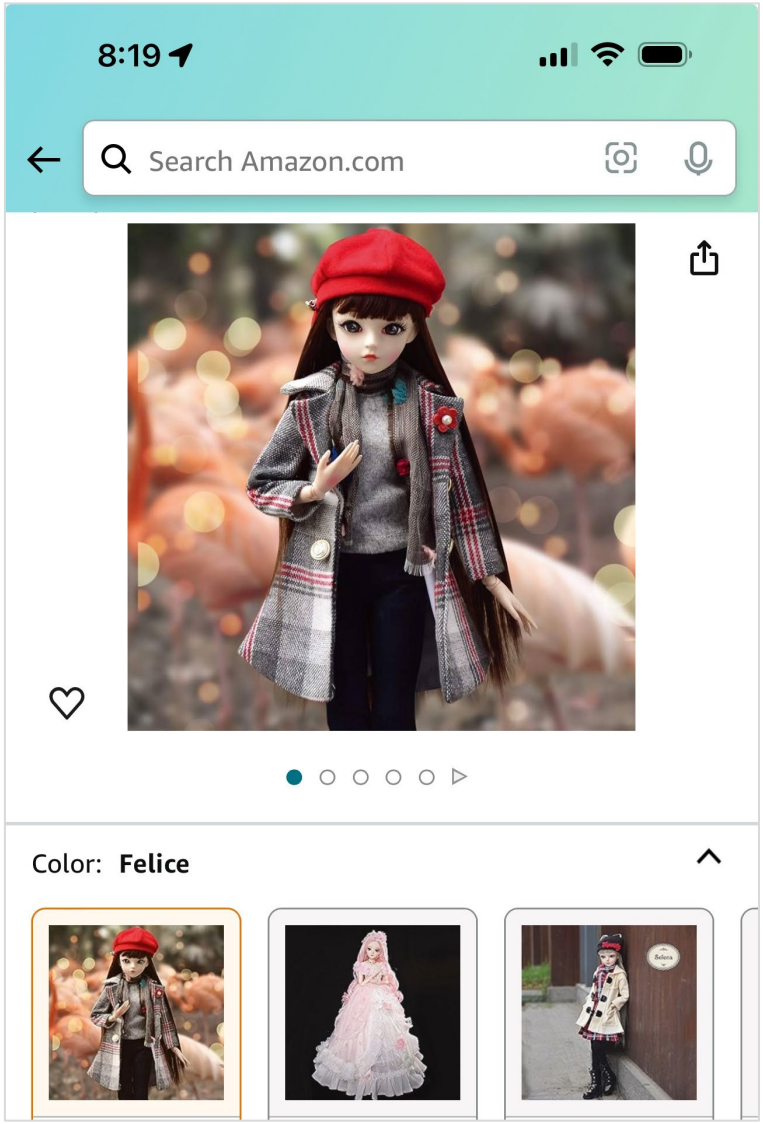
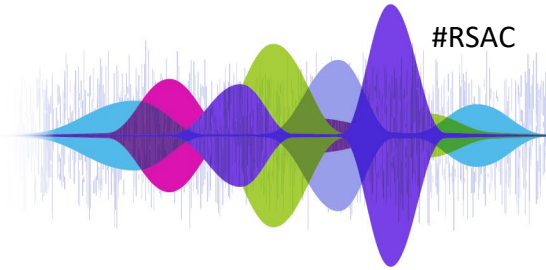
ACM Code of Ethics

"... designed to inspire and guide the ethical conduct of all computing professionals."

- Respect privacy
- Know and respect existing rules pertaining to professional work
- Ensure that the public good is the central concern during all professional computing work



Smart toys

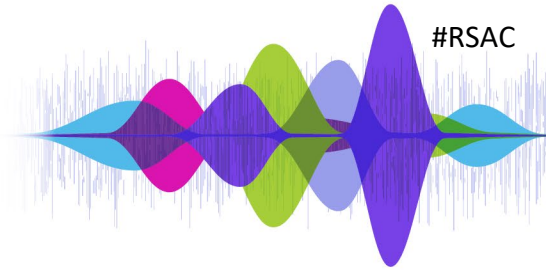


```
$ sudo bettercap -eval "events.ignore ble.device.lost; set $ » {reset}; ble.recon on"
bettercap v2.32.0 (built for linux arm with go1.15.15) [type 'help' for a list of commands]
...
» ble.show

 RSSI ▲  |       MAC         |          Vendor          | Connect |   Seen
 -------  -----------------  -------------------------  -------  --------
-33 dBm | 6c:70:35:6f:d3:1d | Amazon Fulfillment Service | ✓       | 03:45:13
```

Image source: ChatGPT

"I want to play with you. Can you brush my hair?"



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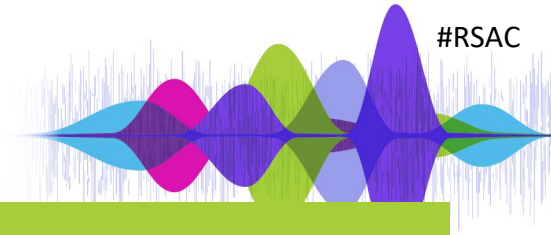
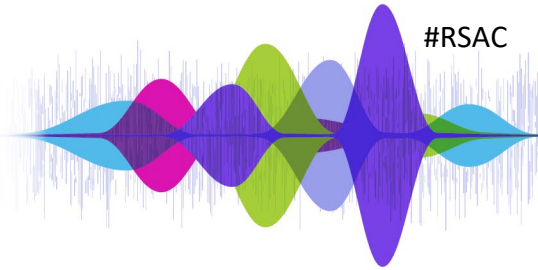
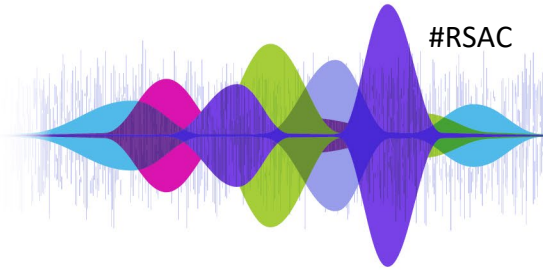


Using artificial intelligence	Breach disclosure	Customer data privacy
Active defense	Applying offensive capabilities	Vulnerability disclosure
Activity monitoring	Preserving data privacy	Bug bounty program operation
Employee activity monitoring	Incident response activity analysis	Responsible cybersecurity research

Apply What You Have Learned Today



- Consider these case studies as examples
- Avoid pursuing closed-minded answers to complex questions
- Establish a relationship with a mentor outside your immediate social circles
- Review big decisions where you were challenged by ethics – would you make a different decision today?
- Adopt and apply a guide for cybersecurity ethical behavior



Three Case Studies

- Is it ethical to write and release exploit tools?
- Is it ethical and moral to teach others how to exploit security vulnerabilities?
- Is it ethical to leave all responsibility for vulnerability disclosure and remediation to a third party?

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